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RUEHSJ/AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE PRIORITY 3398  
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RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 001336

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STATE FOR WHA/CEN ELIA TELLO AND SARA CRAIG, WHA/FO  
GIOVANNI SNIDLE, AND INL/LP AIMEE MARTIN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/08/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [HO](#)  
SUBJECT: HONDURAS'S ASSESSMENT OF CENTRAL AMERICA SECURITY  
REQUIREMENTS

REF: STATE 107145

Classified By: AMB. CHARLES FORD. REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

11. SUMMARY. (C) Post's assessment of the regional security requirements from Honduras focuses on two strategies: a transit zone strategy to disrupt the flow of contraband through Central America, and an anti-crime strategy to reduce the level of violence and address the issues of organized crime, money laundering and gangs. The transit zone strategy requires the continued transformation of military forces to confront the transnational threats of the trafficking of drugs, arms and people, through increased training, joint operations, and the purchase of military equipment better suited for the new threats. The transit zone strategy also requires more involvement by the USG to construct infrastructure for operations and provide assistance for a Regional Counternarcotics Center. This strategy should take advantage of the unique location of Soto Cano Airbase in Honduras as the focus of operations. The anti-crime strategy must focus on reformation of the police, increased training, more emphasis on complex investigations against organized crime, money launders, corrupt officials, and an anti-gang strategy that looks beyond law enforcement to include prevention programs, rehabilitation and eventual reinsertion into society. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) A regional security strategy for Mexico and Central America should contain two essential components: a transit zone strategy and anti-crime strategy. The transit zone strategy is required to disrupt and contain the smuggling of contraband, including drugs, arms, and people, from source countries through and around Central America. The anti-crime strategy is necessary to reduce the level of criminal violence in each country; implement programs to address gang violence and reduce gang membership through rehabilitation and reinsertion programs; and train police, prosecutors, and the judicial system to address corruption, organized crime, and money laundering. All countries in Mexico and Central America are adversely affected by the flow of contraband through their respective territories. Crime is a regional issue as high levels of violence and corruption impact the lives of all citizens while gangs and organized crime operate

throughout the region.

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#### Transit Zone Strategy Against Traffickers

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13. (C) Honduras is a transit country for drugs from the source countries to Mexico and the United States. The majority of the drugs are carried by ships and small planes that stop to refuel or transfer their cargo along the north coast of Honduras or in the Bay Islands. A small amount of drugs are shipped overland. The primary overriding need is a transit zone strategy that will incorporate the military and law enforcement capabilities of each country along the transit route to disrupt the flow of drugs. This requires a regional approach that will utilize assets from each member of SICA to collect intelligence on the various means of transport, analyze and disseminate the information to all members, and then engage in counter-narcotics operations to halt the drugs. In addition to carrying drugs, the ships and planes are responsible for the transport of arms from Honduras to other Central American countries and Mexico. By stopping these illegal transports, the flow of all contraband can be stopped.

14. (C) Post's Country Team has worked with the Honduran Armed Forces (HOAF) to transform the host country's military into a force better suited to address these transnational threats. This transformation begins with doctrine and training and extends through equipment and operations. Military assistance sales are focused on the purchase of new equipment, such as long range light aircraft and patrol craft, to search and interdict drug shipments. The HOAF is slowly moving from military force composed of tanks, artillery, and fighter jets

designed to counter traditional cross-border threats to a lighter, more flexible force to respond to traffickers of contraband.

15. (C) To assist this ongoing transformation of the HOAF and implement a transit zone strategy, there are a number of items that must be provided by either the USG or other SICA members. The Honduran Navy requires fuel for its patrol boats to intercept the go-fast and fishing vessels; aerial radar surveillance in the form of P-3 flights, drones, or observation balloons to track ships and planes within the 12-mile limit; and U.S. Navy vessels for joint operations with the Honduran Navy to increase their role and to act as a second line of defense for any boats that get through.

16. (C) Many opportunities for encouraging partnerships and inter-operability exist through more support for joint operations and training that emphasize counternarcotics, counter-terrorism, and other operations that confront the smuggling of contraband. To expand the reach of the HOAF, the USG is supporting the construction of infrastructure in remote areas of Honduras, such as in the Department of Gracias A Dios, that will serve as bases for counternarcotics and counter-terrorism operations. These bases would be suitable for regional operations involving units of other CA countries. In addition, the USG continues to work with the HOAF to convert inappropriate forces into units specifically designed to counter transnational threats.

17. (C) The members of SICA previously agreed to construct and operate a Regional Counternarcotics Center in Honduras. So far, neither the GOH nor other SICA members have pushed to commence construction. Manned by trained personnel from the CA countries and in touch with elements from all the military forces, this Center could serve as the focus for a transit zone strategy from which to conduct counternarcotics operations. The US military recently upgraded the regional military training facility at La Venta, north of Tegucigalpa. This facility could be adapted to police training and serve as the regional center.

18. (C) One important asset that cannot be overlooked is Soto Cano Airbase in central Honduras. As the only remaining US

military base south of Key West, FL, it provides an excellent base from which training, intelligence gathering, transport, and surveillance can be directed. It remains an under-utilized element in the region, and until the Regional Counternarcotics Center is constructed, Soto Cano could serve as the command and control center for implementation of a transit zone strategy.

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Regional Crime Strategy  
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¶9. (C) The high rate of crime throughout Central America and Mexico is a regional threat that must be addressed as a security issue. The daily violence of robberies and murders discourages international investment, encourages migration to the US as people seek a safer atmosphere to work and raise their family, and causes citizens to lose faith in their elected governments that could lead to the rise of un-democratic, populist leaders. While "common crime" remains the overriding concern, high rates of corruption, the growth of organized crime, increase money laundering, and, of course, the gangs, are all issues that must be included a regional security strategy, as those crimes tend to cross borders and involve criminals who transit throughout CA and Mexico.

¶10. (C) Post has identified reformation of the Honduran Police as one of its priorities. With adequate funding, special advisors and trainers can be assigned to the Honduran Police Academies to improve the quality of police education and teach recruits basic policing and investigative techniques. These trainers would also concentrate on ethics and the importance of human rights. The police also need

basic equipment such as portable crime kits for collecting and analyzing evidence. The Honduran Police have taken steps to reduce corruption in their ranks by requiring all new recruits to undergo a polygraph exam and drug testing all police officers is expected to begin soon. It is in the USG's interest to continue supporting such measures and encourage more.

¶11. (C) Regional information-sharing systems are necessary for the CA countries and Mexico to exchange criminal data, such as bio-metric information. The Honduran Police have requested both a ballistics laboratory and a nation-wide fingerprint database to increase the number of criminal convictions and move away from the reliance on eye-witness testimony. Both the laboratory and the database could be linked to similar systems in other countries so that important information could be shared with neighboring police forces.

¶12. (C) Organized crime, money laundering and corruption are specialized areas of criminal investigation that are currently beyond the capabilities of most regional police forces. Special units should be created, trained, and provided the necessary technical equipment to break up criminal rings and follow the trail of money to its source. Prosecuting attorneys and judges must also be trained to ensure convictions are obtained after arrest. Information sharing among the regional law enforcement units is essential to stop these activities that routinely cross borders, as seen by the recent arrest of six Hondurans who were arrested trying to smuggle USD 800,000 to Panama.

¶13. (C) A regional strategy must also encompass how and where convicted drug traffickers and other high-level criminals will be kept after their convictions. Prisons in Honduras are badly managed, staffed by poorly trained and often corrupt guards, and extremely overcrowded. Drug traffickers continue to run their operations from prison, often recruiting small-time criminals into their organizations. A high-security prison for drug traffickers, with the capability to jam cell phones and other electronic communications, built in a remote area would isolate convicted drug traffickers and reduce their influence in

trafficking operations.

¶14. (C) Finally, gangs are a regional problem that must be addressed by a regional strategy. Law enforcement needs a regional information system to share data on gang activities and gang members. Such a system could be used to track gang members as they travel throughout the region. Simply stopping gang activities and arresting gang members are not sufficient. Programs must be established to rehabilitate ex-gang members who leave gangs, provide training and educational opportunities to assist them in finding employment, and tattoo-removal machines so that ex-gang members can be reinserted into society. Support must continue for educational programs to discourage teenagers from joining gangs, along with drug awareness and anti-violence programs.

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